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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 AMMAN 002302

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (PARA 3 AND 13 CONTENT)

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, EEB AND OES
STATE PASS TO OPIC
STATE SEMEP FOR ALON SACHAR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/15/2019

TAGS: [ECON](#) [ENRG](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SENV](#) [KWBG](#) [JO](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: BOLSTERING SUPPORT FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE THROUGH
REGIONAL ESTH ENGAGEMENT

REF: A. A. AMMAN 1690
 [B.](#) B. AMMAN 1394
 [C.](#) C. TUNIS 757

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Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[11.](#) (C) Key Points:

-- A variety of regional ESTH initiatives have encouraged support for Middle East peace by developing Arab-Israeli working relationships, increasing regional technical and research capacity, and directly improving the lives of citizens.

-- These collaborations can be augmented at this critical juncture to further help advance regional peace efforts.

-- In renewable energy, developing pilot installations in Jordan and the West Bank with USG support through grants, loan financing, and political clout could yield important demonstration projects and help exploit the area's renewable energy potential. These might also slow-down the nuclear energy bandwagon in the region.

-- ESTH engagement might offer a low-risk opportunity to integrate Syria into a cooperative regional framework. Syria could be invited to a planned Middle East peace related environmental capacity building program for Israel, Jordan, and the PA, to be held in Jordan. If this overture is well-received, it could be a positive first step.

-- This message includes an action request, please see paragraph 14.

Manifold ESTH Initiatives Supporting Peace Efforts

[12.](#) (C) A variety of regional ESTH initiatives have been supporting Middle East peace efforts since the 1990's - water management training, environmental defense, cancer registries, scientific research are just a few of the domains. Without the high visibility or the keen urgency of

the political process, and often functioning quietly away from the public eye, ESTH engagement has continued to foster Arab-Israeli collaborative projects for many years. As one would expect, some have been more successful than others, particularly those that address common problems, pursue practical solutions, and build mutual confidence. They have created strong and lasting, working relationships between the governments at the technical levels, and in many cases also improved the quality of life of the citizens of the region. Cooperation Leads to Strong Outcomes

3.(C) The EXACT regional water databanks program is an example of U.S.-facilitated collaboration that has continued to convene Israeli, Jordanian, and Palestinian water officials regularly and almost without interruption since 1995 - under the framework of the Oslo Accords. While the U.S. and other donors have supported a variety of successful technical projects and training over the years, the value of the working relationships developed through these programs outweighs even the positive technical results. Ali Subah, a longtime Jordanian EXACT representative recently told ESTHOFF that it was because of the strong relationships developed through the EXACT framework that Israel provided Jordan with an 11 million cubic meter (MCM) water loan during the summer 2008 draught. He noted, "during our discussions, the Israelis whom we have known for a long time asked us how much water we needed. We said 11 MCM - and they said "okay." It is because we have been working together for so long." During that particular ly stressful draught, the Jordanian Water Minister told Emboffs "Israel saved my skin."

¶4. (C) The Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) program which has funded grants for Arab and Israeli scientists to collaborate on a variety of topics relevant to regional economic development has also resulted in many tangible

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project outcomes and strong working relationships - while also benefiting the USG. During a July 2009 ESTH Hub visit to Tunisia, it was difficult to obtain meetings with Government of Tunisia representatives (ref C), but not with the Pasteur Institute (a renowned semi-governmental institution) and the recipient of a new MERC grant to collaborate with Israeli and Palestinian scientists. (Comment: Given the clear successes in building sustainable regional ties, ESTH engagement in support of the President's efforts to achieve Middle East peace should be sustained and even augmented to include a greater spectrum of Arab participation. End comment.)

Looking Ahead: Renewable Energy Potential

¶5. (C) Israel is expected to establish feed-in tariffs for renewable energy (RE) shortly, a critical step on the wide-scale deployment of solar energy projects. Many Israeli solar power company start-ups such as Arava Power (expecting to deploy a 5MW photovoltaic system by May 2010) have a desire to engage in regional renewable energy projects with their Palestinian and Jordanian neighbors. This desire emanates not only from commercial ambition and hope to improve Israel's relationships with its neighbors, but also to get around the restrictive land-use rights situation in Israel. It is unlikely that Israel will be connected to the Jordanian (and by extension the Middle Eastern) grid in the near future. However, RE projects in Jordan capitalizing on cheap land availability could in theory be connected by special purpose cables to export power to Israel. One entrepreneur stated to ESTHOFFs that Jordan has a comparative advantage in solar power and should become a power exporter (ref A).

¶6. (C) Another reason for the Israeli desire to promote regional RE projects is to reduce the likelihood of Jordanian

nuclear energy plants coming to fruition (ref B). The Chief Scientist of the Ministry of National Infrastructure voiced his fears about the potential catastrophic effects of a Jordanian nuclear plant being placed in the seismic-prone area of Aqaba. Yosef Abromovitz, CEO of Arava Power was more blunt, saying that placing a nuclear plant in the region was likely to increase the chances of terrorist strikes and other disasters throughout the region. Furthermore, RE supporters contend that in the 10-15 years it would take for any Jordanian nuclear plants to become operational, solar power would have easily achieved grid parity and have become even more economical and safe than nuclear power.

¶7. (C) Suggestions from Israeli interlocutors for the USG to foster increased regional RE projects include:

--Provide grants to allow pilot RE projects to be deployed in Jordan and Palestine. According to Arava, a 20 percent down payment needed for a 5MW plant would equate to \$6 million which the USG could support through a grant.

--Provide loan guarantees or other financing support for RE Pilots through OPIC, Exim Bank, or other financing mechanisms.

--Resuscitate the Jordan-Israel energy working group that was formed in the mid-1990s and had developed detailed plans for deploying solar farms in Jordan.

-- Use USG influence, political clout, and financing support to create the political will to establish regional RE projects.

Product Development and Bio-Fuels Collaboration:

¶8. (SBU) A recently announced venture, MME New Diesel between an Israeli company and the Jordanian National Energy Research Center, has been making the news as it hopes to develop second-generation biofuels from agricultural waste using German technology. Originally facilitated by the Peres Center for Peace, the venture is now being considered for product development funding support by the USG supported Trilateral Industrial Development Fund (TRIDE). TRIDE aims

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to serve as a catalyst for joint R&D and product development between Israeli, Jordanian, and American companies and cost-shares up to 50 percent with companies to the point of commercial readiness. Recently, the TRIDE fund has suffered from modest resources. The TRIDE Executive Director is seeking continued USG support for one-third of a new \$2 million funding round, which according to him has financial commitments from Israel and Jordan. Targeted USG funding for specific RE or the proposed bio-fuels collaboration could also provide a boost to regional energy projects.

Environment - the first Peace Park?

¶9. (SBU) Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME) is a dynamic regional environmental NGO working in Israel, Jordan, and Palestine. FoEME is well known to the USG and benefits from a variety of USG grants. FoEME has many ambitious and laudable projects on-going to support Middle East peace - and is well recognized for these efforts, including through receiving Time magazine's "Environmental Heroes of 2008" award and hosting former President Carter and Bishop Desmond Tutu under the Elders framework.

¶10. (SBU) One of FoEME's current projects is the establishment of a eco-tourism "Peace Park" between the core parties near the confluence of the Jordan and Yarmouk rivers. This site brings history, potential cooperation, and strong symbolism. FoEME already has several grants from European sources to assist with rehabilitating this largely abandoned park and plans to start bringing German eco-tourists from the

Israeli side. Jordanian access to the park is tightly controlled by its military, however, and will need very high level political buy-in including the King's blessing. FoEME is pushing hard for this through its many contacts and claims that the Jordanian Prime Minister, Minister of Environment, and the Mayors of the local communities are also supportive of the park. FoEME has suggested that USG support (political and/or financial) for creating such a "Peace Park" would be a great symbol for any lasting peace process outcome.

Regional Efforts: To Include Syria or Not?

¶11. (C) Amman ESTH Hub has noted increased track II science diplomacy efforts underway recently with Syria: a ten-person U.S. delegation, including the American Association for Advancement of Science (AAAS) and the National Academies of Science, visited Syria in early 2009 and also met with President Assad as part of a high-level dialogue on Science, Health and Higher Education. As a follow up, AAAS held a March 2009 conference on U.S.-Syria Science Collaboration in Washington. Looking ahead, the Civilian Research Development Foundation is partnering with ICARDA and the University of Damascus in planning a workshop on Water and Agriculture in November 2009. These track II engagements are helping build mutual confidence and maintain a dialogue with Syria. USG support for these interactions would benefit the strengthening of regional ties and give the U.S. additional tools with which to engage Syrians.

¶12. (SBU) Recent interactions with Syrian environmental NGOs have indicated a desire for increased U.S. support to improve environmental management in Syria. There has been increased Syrian - USG technical engagement through the CDC to help Syria establish an epidemiology center. These fledgling interactions hold the promise of bolstering the bilateral relationship. ESTH engagements on a parallel multilateral level could also be a vehicle to draw Syria back into a regional framework to support peace efforts.

¶13. (C) One potential vehicle for this could be the NEA's ongoing multilateral programs, which supported the Multilateral Water and Environmental Working Groups. Neither working group has convened for many years, but the U.S. has continued to support multilateral capacity building under their auspices on a regular basis (an air pollution workshop for Israeli, Jordanian, and Palestinian officials was held in Istanbul in August 2008). The U.S. plans to hold a multilateral environmental

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capacity-building workshop in Jordan in late 2009 or early 2010 on Land Reclamation and Desertification for Jordanian, Palestinian, and Israeli participants. With the concurrence of those beneficiary parties, we could extend an invitation to the Government of Syria environmental authorities and some of the environmental NGOs. If Syria does attend the workshop, we would be helping them in strengthening environmental capacity in a much-needed non-political arena, while supporting our efforts to draw them into greater regional engagement with their neighbors.

¶14. (C) Action request: Post requests the Department's guidance on the issue of including Syrian participation in the capacity-building workshop in Jordan on Land Reclamation and Desertification to be held in late 2009 or early 2010. End action request.

¶15. (U) This message has been cleared by, and includes input from, Embassy Tel Aviv.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/amman>
Beecroft